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ABSTRACT

Encouraging parents to participate in school education to improve home-school relations is one of the prime focuses in the current education reform movement in Hong Kong. However, there is a paucity of empirical studies on how parental involvement in school is affected by parental social status. This study reports the thoughts and perceptions of four parents of the middle and working class on their involvement in the schooling process of their children. By comparing the practice of how they are involved, eight categories of proposition emerged from the data. Findings indicate that parents of the working class are in a less favorable situation in participating in school activities. And there are different types of attitudes toward involvement in school education among parents of different social classes. It is hoped that school personnel and the Education Department of Hong Kong can develop appropriate strategies to promote home-school cooperation so that parents of different social classes can have equal chances to participate in the schooling process of their children. (Contains 38 references.) (Author/BT)

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The Impact of Social Class on Development of Home-School Relations in Hong Kong

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The Impact of Social Class on Development of Home-School Relations in Hong Kong

Abstract

Encouraging parents to participate in school education is one of the prime focuses in current education reform movement in Hong Kong so as to improve home-school relations. However, there is a paucity of empirical studies on how parent involvement in school is affected by the social status parents belong to. This study captures the thoughts and perceptions of four parents of middle and working-class on their involvement in the schooling process of their children. By comparing the practice of how they are involved, there are eight categories of proposition emerging from the data. The findings indicate that parents of working-class are in a less favourable situation in participating in school activities. It is hoped that school personnel and Education Department of Hong Kong can develop appropriate strategies to promote home-school cooperation so that parents of different social class can have equal chances to participate in the schooling process of their children.

Introduction

The promotion of home-school relations has recently become the focus of educational reform in Hong Kong. In 1991, The Education and Manpower Branch and Education Department recommended in the policy document, '*The School Management Initiatives*' (SMI) that school management should allow for participation in decision making by all concerned parties including parents and teaching staff. Since then, the recommendation has drawn the attention of school personnel and the general public to the discussion of the issue of parent involvement in schools. Marked evidences from a lot of research in the West demonstrate that partnership between teachers and parents can help enhance positive development of children's self-concepts and can make contribution to the long term development of school effectiveness (Epstein, 1991; Munn, 1993; Golby, 1993; Bastiani, 1993; Berger, 1995; Hornby, 1995). However, many school principals have had a lot of doubts such as whether it is ripe time to get parents involved in the school, whether teachers and parents can get along well with parents and whether parent involvement will facilitate or impede school operation. In fact, the Home-School Cooperation Research Report (Education Department, 1994) pointed out that though parents and school personnel admitted there was a need to work collaboratively with each other for the own good of students, both parties were not willing to be partners.

Since 1994, instead of recommending schools to invite parents into school as members of school management committee, Education Department has encouraged schools to set up Parent-teacher Associations (PTAs) so as to increase contacts between parent and teachers and to improve their relationship. With the assistance of officers from Education

Department, a number of PTAs have been established in many schools and parents have started participating at different levels of school activities such as helping to organise extra-curricular activities, attending events for parents, collaborating with children in doing school projects, attending parent teacher conferences, acting as library assistant, etc. Although the idea of parents as school managers has still not yet been actualised in Hong Kong (Ng, 1998), there are marked examples showing that home-school relations are gradually improved when parents have been involved in the educational process of their children. Education Commission Report No. 7 (1997) emphasises that 'participation of teachers, parents and students in school management and school activities is conducive to the development of quality school education' (p.18).

While it is believed that parent involvement is beneficial to social and academic development of school children, there is a paucity of or even a lack of empirical data in Hong Kong to throw illumination on the differences in involvement among parents, especially those from different social backgrounds. It is unrealistic to look into parent involvement in school without taking into account the influence of social class (Lareau, 1996). In the West, many studies have put focus on how social class affects the level of parent involvement in the educational process of the children (Lareau, 1989, 1996; Ball et al, 1996; Ornstein & Levine 1985) and their findings can help facilitate parents from different socio-economic backgrounds to be involved in school education. This paper reports an exploratory study, carried out in 1998 in a primary school in Hong Kong, designed to illuminate how parents of different social class are involved in the school activities. After capturing their thoughts and perceptions about their relationship with school, a comparative study between parents of working-class and middle-class was made. Their opinions were clustered into eight categories. The understanding of the impact of social class on parent involvement can help schools and Education Department develop school-based strategies to promote home-school cooperation.

Social Class Influence on Parent Involvement: the Western Perspectives

According to dictionary of sociology, social class is defined as "a large category of people within a system of social stratification who have a similar socioeconomic status in relation to other segments of their community or society". (Theodorson & Theodorson, 1972, p.384) In a system of social stratification, a combination of various social and economic indexes of rank that are used to determine socioeconomic status (SES) of a certain group of people in research studies.

Lareau (1996) criticizes that home-school cooperation models seem to over-emphasise a consensus between parents and school personnel since the authors do not consider the powerful influence of social class difference on parents' participation in school education. For instance, parents of working-class hold the idea of separation of responsibility in education whereas middle-class parents see themselves as having shared responsibility for the education process of their children (Lareau, 1996; Esptein, 1987). Dauber & Epstein,

(1989) found that working parents are unlikely to be participating in school but are more involved at home with their children's learning activities.

Social class and educational achievement

Ballantine (1993) highlights that SES of families is a powerful and determining predictor of school performance. The relationship between social class and education has always been studied by researchers in sociological perspectives. For instances, the research conducted in 'Middletown' by Lynd & Lynd (1929) might be one of the first to study association between social class and educational achievement. They found that parents of different social backgrounds recognise the importance of education for their children. However, working-class children do not have many of the verbal and behavioral skills and traits that are prerequisite to success in school. The community studies of Warner et al (1944) indicates that lower class children do not have potentiality for upward mobility. Though life position can be improved through good education and hard work, and it is assumed that people have equal education opportunities to experience upward mobility, the survey done by Rossides (1990) starting with its leading question., "Who gets the higher levels of education?", shows that students from lower class have much lower likelihood of going on to university than those of higher class, even if they might have higher ability. Ornstein & Levine (1985) concluded by saying that children of working-class are much less likely to be successful in schooling process than are the children of middle-class; and students are also much less likely to get middle-class jobs than are students from middle-class homes. Thus, when people are born and socialised from their early ages to be members of their own social class, they will develop a strong tie of loyalties to the values of their class, which strongly influences the school performance of the children by shaping their educational goal and motivation.

Social class and parent-teacher interaction

Social class differences also affect how parents and teachers interact with each other. Researches on home-school relations tell us that many teachers see parents' involvement important and they seek their participation (ED, 1994; Gallup, 1985; National Education Association, 1972). It is also reported that teachers request uniform involvement from parents of different class, and yet, parents of upper-middle-class are usually more directly involved and more active in managing their children's education at home and at school than those of lower and working-class (Hoover-Dempsey et al, 1987; Becker & Esptein, 1982, Ballantine, 1993). Lareau (1989) finds that teachers treat parents differently and it results in discriminative and unfair treatment towards parents of working-class and lower class. Lareau accuses schools of their highly discriminative policy in interacting differently with middle-class parents and lower-class parents. She argues that schools welcome middle-class families and make them friendly. It may be because teachers who belong to middle-class may feel less comfortable, less talkative and less friendly with working-class parents. On the other hand, parents of working-class students are less comfortable in communicating with school than upper-middle-class parents (Cummins, 1986) and they also feel alienated and helpless in their interaction with school if their children have

problems (Baker & Stevenson, 1986).

Lareau stresses that the meaning of parent investment differs drastically among different backgrounds of parents. Middle-class parents may take a more active role to initiate contacts with school, to criticise or to complain about teachers because they define it as their rights and they have confidence to do so (Lareau, 1996; Hoover-Dempsey et al, 1987). By contrast, working-class parents do not presume the same rights. Lareau also found in her study that parents of working-class described teachers as 'the school' whereas parents of middle-class could refer to specific names of teachers or school administrators. The sorts of rights and responsibilities recognised by parents of different SES affect their attitudes towards their relationships with school.

Social class: cultural and social capital

The concept of shared responsibilities between home and school in children's educational process is recognised by many scholars promoting home-school relations (Lareau, 1989; Bastiani, 1989; Epstein, 1987). However, Coleman (1987) indicates that many parents, especially those of high SES, concentrate in their jobs and income, leaving the task of socialisation to school and ignoring the importance of their inputs: such as attitudes, effort, and conception of self. Coleman finds that these are the necessary elements in the rearing process and he calls them social capital. Parents, whatever SES they belong to, who are aware of the need to be involved at home to educate children, do provide children with the sort of social capital helping to lead to the children's success in school (Lareau, 1989). Uneducated parents who devote much of the time to the concern of their children's school performance demonstrate a high level of social capital at home. (Coleman, 1987) Coleman accuses that parents, nowadays, with high levels of human capital-increasing educational attainment, are at the same time, decrease investment of social capital on children, as reflected by the duration of their presence at home and the duration of parent-child communication about children's social, academic and personal development. Hence, parent involvement, as a sort of social capital, should not be neglected by parents of different SES.

In school, children's social position can be reflected in their academic achievement, their educational plan, their test scores and their attendance. Thus, class differences in schooling , opined by Murphy (1989), are owing chiefly to what Bowles (1977) called class sub-culture. And schools always tend to disseminate the value and behaviour patterns of middle-class in their instructional process. (Lareau, 1989; Ballantine, 1993) For example, schools adopt particular language structures with which students of higher SES have already been familiarised at home and these cultural experiences, as reiterated by Lareau (1989), can help facilitate students' adjustment to school and their academic performance. Thus, social class differences can aid or impede students to comply with the request of the school. Bourdieu (1987) called this family advantage as 'cultural capital'. Though it does not mean that, as explained above, amount of social capital increases in proportion to the social backgrounds of the families, cultural capital of different SES families do affect the input of social capital. Lareau (1989) concludes that more cultural

resources are available in the family of high SES and they are associated with educational success.

Methodology

In Hong Kong, only a few research findings in Hong Kong can tell whether parents of different social backgrounds can have equal opportunities to get involved in school education. In the West, lots of studies demonstrate differences in participation among parents of different socioeconomic status. This leads to the development of different strategies to help parents of different social backgrounds participate in school education of their children. However, research findings in the West cannot be applied to the situation of Hong Kong, a society dominated mainly by Chinese. It is worth exploring and illuminating the phenomenon of how parents of different social class are involved in school activities in Hong Kong. By finding out the powerful impact of social class on development of home-school relationship, individual school personnel or Education Department may take findings into consideration when developing strategies to promote home-school cooperation so that parents of different social class can have equal opportunities to participate in the schooling process of their children.

The study is adopting a qualitative approach where naturalistic method of inquiry is the research methodological paradigm. It is appropriate for dealing with data 'where there are multiple constructed realities that can only be studied holistically' (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.37). The subject for this study was a primary school in Hong Kong. It took half a year to complete the study during which the investigator paid occasional visits to the school. There was no specific reasons for choosing this school except that students from different social positions, namely middle-class and working-class, were equally distributed in every class of the school. Four families of different social class were purposefully selected for semi-structured in-depth interviews according to the types of housing they lived and their occupations. The mothers were interviewed because the fathers were not always at home. Eventually, of the middle-class parents, one was a lecturer in a tertiary institute and one was working in the government office. Two working-class mothers were housewives. The occupations of their husbands were taxi driver and construction worker. They looked after their children at home. The duration for each interview was about an hour. School events such as parent day and meetings of Parent-Teacher Association were attended so as to collect multi-data through unstructured observation on parent involvement in school events.

The five levels of parent-school involvement suggested by Epstein (1992, 1996) were adopted as the conceptual framework for interviewing parents. Questions asked were semi-structured and mainly related to the following levels of involvement.

1. Parenting: To assist families with the basic skills of parenting and child-rearing and setting home conditions to support learning.

2. Communicating: To communicate with families about school programs and students' progress.
3. Volunteering: To improve recruitment, training and schedule so as to involve parents as volunteers or audiences at schools.
4. Learning at home: To involve parents in learning activities with their children at home, such as home-work and other curricular activities.
5. Making decisions: To include parents as participants in managing the schools and contributing to make decisions for the better development of the school.

Findings and Discussion

The views of parents of four families of different socio-economic status are assumed instrumental in framing realities (Lincoln & Guba, 1995). They were classified into the eight categories of proposition. Each category of proposition carries and illuminates the contrast of involvement in school between parents of middle-class and working-class. The findings and accompanying discussion are therefore framed by each category of proposition.

1. Comparative advantages in the choice of school

In Hong Kong, after finishing primary six, students are allocated to secondary schools within their residential districts through government's central allocation computer system. Allocation is based on the academic achievement of students and the choice of parents. However, middle-class parents enjoyed comparative advantages in choosing ideal secondary schools for their children. Two of the middle-class parents interviewed claimed that they were acquainted with members of the school council so it was easy for their children to enter the school. The father of one of the students had been studying in the school. It would provide bonus points for entering schools.

> *"Well, this is a good and reputable school, everyone wants their children to study here. Since their father had spent his primary and secondary ages here in this school, we got bonus marks for our children's entrance. However, it was not enough; we had to ask one of my friends for help; that's to request one of the members of the school management board to write a letter of recommendation to ensure that my sons could be successfully accepted." (Interview: middle-class parent).*

As for working-class parents, they could do nothing to select schools for their children but rest on the allocation computer system. It was difficult for them to get to know anyone in the school council. Besides, comparative advantages were demonstrated on the travelling expenses to school. Travelling expense was not a determinant factor for the middle-class parent to choose school for their child. However, the working-class parent had to take it into consideration. In fact, travelling expenses were a part of economic burden; therefore, she avoided selecting a school for her child which was far away from home.

2. Monopolisation of power in participation

In the event of electing executive committee members of Parent-teacher Association (PTA), the school principal tried to invite parents of different social positions to be candidates. However, majority of them were of middle-class positions, such as teachers, social workers, government officers, psychologists, etc. Though the principal attempted to get three working-class parents into the list of candidates, the outcome was that no working-class parents were elected and all members of the executive committee were monopolised by middle-class parents. It could be imagined that policies to be formulated in the meetings of PTA would be in favour of the interest of middle-class parents and students. For instance, in a meeting, the chairperson of PTA suggested to offer 'Phonetics' courses for parents since she found that a lot of parents did not know how to teach their children to pronounce English words. However, one member of the PTA said these courses might not be the immediate needs of parents in the school since many of them did not know English at all. (Observation: PTA meeting)

Working-class parents voiced their grievance among themselves but they did not dare to speak straight to the principal on an issue concerning over-crowdedness on the school bus,. Because of the human capital possessed by middle-class parents, one of them was invited to be the representative to deal with the matter with the school principal. Monopolisation of power in participation is not the intention of the middle-class parents. They are endowed with such type of power in school since they are believed to have high levels of human capital - educational attainment.

3. The influence of cultural capital on parents' responses to teacher's requests

Bourdieu (1987) found that middle-class families enjoyed the advantages of cultural capital that could help to comply with the request of the school. In the interview, the middle-class parent could state exactly what the class teacher requested her to do at home. The most important thing was to sign the student handbook. It seemed that there was mutual understanding between the class teacher and her even if she did not comply with her request occasionally. They would not put blame on each other. In fact, the middle-class mother would also try her utmost to work with her child to submit assignment the next morning. She thought that it should be their responsibility to comply with the teacher. It seemed that the middle-class mother respected the teacher very much and hadn't had any complaints about the request.

> *"She requests us to read the student handbook and sign on it. As mentioned before, she didn't put blame on me for not signing in the handbook. She sometimes understands how busy I am. She also requests us to put an eye on my child's homework. I think it's reasonable. Generally speaking, we have done the best to comply with her requests. For example, I worked with my child late at night for the social studies project because he had to submit it the next morning. That's why I worked hard with him. It's the need of my child; might be it's also*

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about his dignity; he must hand it on to the teacher." (Interview: middle-class parent)

As for the working-class mother, she found that the class teacher did not request or expect anything but her child behaving well in the classroom.

> *"I don't feel any requests from the class teacher. She just expects my child to behave well in class; then she will be satisfied. She says my child's academic performance is not so good that she is now studying in a normal class but not an elite class. She doesn't have any special requests to a student in a normal class." (Interview: working-class parent)*

> *"Thus, there are totally no requests from the class teacher. If my child was in an elite class, there would then be a lot of homework. Now she hasn't informed us whether the homework my child submitted complies with her requests or not. I think the only request is that the child should hand in all the homework in time (Interview: working-class parent)*

The discriminative attitudes of the class teacher did make the working-class parent unhappy because she thought that her child was given up in the learning process by the teacher. It seemed that she felt helpless but she did not make any complaint about it. She did not find it her right to make request from the teacher but kept silent. She thought that it was destiny that made her child like that and it was nothing wrong with the teacher but it was the fault of her child.

> *"I felt disgusting and unhappy. It seems that the class teacher has already given them up though my child is a bit naughty and like watching TV instead of studying hard. I cannot deny that it is a fact that my child is lazy. My eldest daughter asks them to do homework right away. She didn't listen to her and always says that she'll do it after the cartoon program. The teacher gives her up because it's mainly the fault of my child. That's destiny. I felt unhappy at the very beginning, but it's the teacher who says so, I don't and I'm not eager to have any request or expectation from her. (Interview: middle-class parent)*

4. Perception on the rights to make complaints

Though the middle-class mother was sometimes not satisfied with the class teacher, she never intended to make any complaints to her. She understood how hard the teacher was working and she also did not want to set an example for her son to go to challenge the teacher. It was her belief that working closely and constructively with the teacher was a better way to educate her son than being enemy of school.

> *No, as a parent, I feel unhappy but doesn't mean that I have to go to challenge the teacher. Then my son will challenge the teacher as well at any time. I admit that I am passive but I understand how hard the teacher is working. That's why I didn't go. But my husband was once very angry with the*

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method of how the teacher taught my child's mathematics. Eventually we didn't go to complain about her because we should not look down on her as a teacher. On the whole, we try avoiding making complaints unless it is necessary. I don't want to set a model to my child that complaining is a way to solve problem. This is my belief and my value orientation. (Interview: middle-class parent)

It seems that parents with higher education will make further consideration before making a decision to complain. There exist some sort of mutual respect and understanding between home and school. On the other hand, the working-class parent did not make any complaints to the class teacher not because of mutual respect, but because of being frightened that the class teacher would treat her daughter worse, and because of the authority of the teacher. She knew that she was unhappy. If the teacher had talked to her about her child in school in an encouraging way, she would have felt better. Even if there were complaints made by the working-class mother, it was not about how her child could stay happily in school but was about questioning the teacher's method of scoring in her child's dictation exercises. Thus the working-class looked at things just within the scope of her child's benefits in the school. However, the way of complaining was not the sort of face to face or telephone contact, but relying on the message attached in the handbook.

'Ah! I have complained once. I wrote a memo and attached it on the student handbook to complain about the marking criteria and bias towards my child. I felt unequal when the class teacher deducted too many marks from my child's dictation exercise without a consistent criteria. Thus, I would like to reflect what I felt to the class teacher." (Interview: working-class parent)

5. *Purposes of participating in school events*

The middle-class mother was so busy that it was difficult for her to participate in school events such as sports day, PTA but she still expressed that she would try her best to go simply because she wanted to demonstrate her support to her son. The intention of participating in school events can illustrate the method of child-rearing in the middle-class family. There was mutual communication between the child and the parent before deciding to go for the event. It was because that the middle-class parent emphasised liberty and autonomy in rearing his child.

"On Parents' Day, I went to get the academic result and talked with the class teacher for five minutes. I didn't go to the PTA meeting since I was too busy. I was invited to go to the Sports Day but didn't go. Yes, I did go to the school concert since it was in the evening and my son did want me to go. I support my child. Before I go to school for this event, I must ask for his opinion on whether he wants me to go. Anyway, I try my best to support school; for instance, I go to the school concert and I take part in fund raising. I am a bit liberal and free in child-rearing." (Interview: middle-class parent)

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Since the working-mother was a housewife, she was keen on looking forward to going for the school events. Of course, she could know more about the school in these events but the purpose of going might put focus on whether she could get any advantages. For example, she went to a day camp because it was subsidised by school. She went to the health seminar because there was food provided. She went to seminar on secondary school placement because it was important for her child of getting into a secondary school in future. It was quite different from the perspective of the middle-class parent. It seems that the purpose of the involvement of the working-class parent was mainly not for support her child or the school.

> *"We went for a day camp once. This was organised by the new principal. There were less activities before. I also participated in a seminar about health and food. One of the reasons is that food was provided. Another time that I went to school was to attend the talk on allocation of places in secondary schools. You know, one of my daughter was now in primary five. She's going to secondary school student soon. I got to know more about the system." (Interview: working-class parent)*

Orientation of how parents of different social class perceive the meaning of parent involvement in their children's education is different. The middle-class mother perceived it as a way to enhance the personal and social development of her child which was neglected very much in the examination-oriented school system in Hong Kong. However, the working-class parent perceived it in a traditional way that education was a means for upward mobility. Therefore, the purpose of getting involved was for the academic improvement of the child.

> *"What are the benefits of parents being involved in their child's education?" (Question)*
>
> *"If school can organise more activities. I would like to participate in them. I haven't gone to work. Thus, I have more time to participate in their learning activities at home. If there are more parent-child project, I think they will be working harder and having incentive to study. Besides, I can know more." (Interview: working-class parent)*
>
> *"I think it is helpful to enhance my child's self-esteem. I can also know more about school. I respect my child. However, I have no time to participate at school." (Interview: middle-class parent)*

6. *Home rules: liberal vs. scheduled*

It is strange that the middle-class mother stressed that there were no definite home rules in regulating and scheduling their learning activities at home. When to do homework was up to the discretion of her son. There might be two possible reasons. Firstly, both the father and mother were going out to work so there was no time to watch their child do

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homework at day time. It all relied on the house-keeper. Secondly, it might be that the parents had already developed a kind of relationship emphasising mutual respect and trust with the child who was trained to be autonomous, self-regulating and independent because the working mother had been trained to be so by her parents in a family of high SES background.

> *"Well...., since we are educated, it is advantageous for me to participate in my child's learning both at home and in school. I am open and my husband too. There is no discipline at home. We try not to push them so much. Let them develop themselves. Maybe my parents also gave me a certain degree of autonomy when I was a student". (Interview: middle-class parents)*

The working-class parent did have home rules. Every day after school, her daughter would spend two hours doing homework after the lunch; and then another one or two hours on watching TV. Every thing was scheduled by the mother. The mother and her three daughters seldom went out since it was expensive to go to shops and restaurant.

> *"Yes, there are rules. She attends school in the morning. After school, she has lunch at home; then she has to do homework for two hours until 4 pm. After that she can watch TV for one or two hours. We then have dinner at 6 pm. Then, there will be two hours TV watching before going to bed. These are the rules. She does not object." (Interview: working-class parent)*

On the other hand, because of the cultural capital the middle-class mother owned, she could arrange her son to go for some sort of extra-curricular activities after school. This indeed cost much amount of money to the working-class parent who could actually not afford. The activities to be committed had also been consulted with the son of the middle-class parent so as to make sure that it was his will to take up those activities.

> *"I try to arrange some other activities to replace their watching TV. For example, my elder son goes to learn French. My younger son takes part in the football training course organised by the Urban Council and learns speaking English in a private institution." (Interview: middle-class parent)*

7. Gender difference in involvement: determinant of social capital

Coleman (1987) finds that inputs of parents in involvement in terms of attitudes, effort in communication with children, self-conception, etc. are necessary element of social capital in the educational process of the children. Whatever social positions parents belong to, they can supply children with social capital that can help facilitate successful achievement in school. In the interviews, the middle-class parents demonstrated this important element towards their child's academic and personal development. They did this by having the conception of sharing responsibility between each other. They did not want to let their child down. On participation school events, the father and mother had consensus on the

basis that whoever was available for school events, who would go. Usually, the father would go for school events since he understood how hard his wife was working for her lectures and her studies.

> *"I remember that I didn't visit the school last year. It was my husband who went for the Parents' Day. I'm too busy to go; you know I've been occupied by the lectures and paper writing. Yes, I remember the latest time I went to school was to apply leave for my child since we were going for holiday. We share the responsibility. Whoever has time, who will go for school visit. Just depends on the time available to us. We will try to go together." (Interview: middle-class parent)*

There was gender difference in division of labour on teaching the child's school subjects. The mother specialised in English Language while the father was expert at Chinese Language and Mathematics. The time shared with the child on homework depended on the subject training background of both father and mother.

> *"There's not exactly any gender role difference in education our child. There may be some differences in subjects. He is a PhD; then, he puts much attention to the children's Maths and Chinese Language. I look after their English and Social Studies". (Interview: middle-class parent)*

Moreover, decision about the child's education would be made together by both the middle-class mother and father. They tried to consult each other so as to make a way to resolve the problems concerning the schooling process of their child.

As for the working-class family, the mother was the only one responsible for her daughters' studies. Sometimes, she asked her eldest daughter to assist her younger sister in doing homework. Her husband did nothing after work, claiming that it was the mother's duty to look after their studies and every thing at home. His duty was to make a living for the family. In fact, he was feeling completely exhausted after a day driving of the taxi. It seems that the working-class family did not enjoy the social capital as the middle-class family had. The father had to work from day to night. Besides, as he was less educated, there was no intention or even no incentive for him to spend a little time on their children's homework. Looking after the school education of the children rested much on the mother and the eldest sister.

> *"I do all the tutoring work at home. I go to school for Parents' Day. My husband hasn't done anything about their school work. He says that he feels exhausted every day after work. He won't do anything about their studying. He requests me to look after them. Whenever, I come across any trouble about their homework, I'll ask the eldest sister to teach them. She is studying in a good secondary school. She is obedient. Thus, she helps me a lot in sharing the teaching roles at home." (Interview: working-class parent)*

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8. Social Network

The working-class mother had developed communication network with several of the students' parents in the same class. They would arrive half an hour earlier to the school gate to receive their child at the end of the lesson. There, they exchanged information about homework, teachers' teaching style and anything about school so that they could obtain something that might be advantages to their child's academic achievement. The middle-class parents did not go to pick up their child by themselves. Their child took the school bus. The mother had little chance or even had no intention to speak to any parents even if she was going to pick up her child by herself. The network of getting information on the school policy and matters concerning her child's learning activities in school relied much on her friends whose children were also studying in the same school and who knew the teachers in that school.

> *From whom do you usually get the information from about the school? (Question)*
>
> *"From some parents. When we are standing at the school gate waiting to receive our children, we usually chat there about the academic performance of the children, comparing the class teachers and exchange information about what they know about the school, the teachers or anything about school. I even got two telephone numbers of the parents." (Interview: working-class parent)*
>
> *"No contact with other parents. The only contact is made between my husband and one of his friends whose child is also studying in the same class. We are not so nervous about the school of our children. Maybe because we all studied in schools with reputation. We know what it is." (Interview: middle-class parent)*

Conclusion

This study has provided insights into how the powerful influence of social class difference on parent involvement. Its purpose is not to generalise but to illuminate the phenomena which were analysed and discussed above under eight categories of proposition. Developing effective home-school relationship is one of the main focuses in today's education reform movement in Hong Kong. Most of the schools and the Education Department have made effort to improve communication between home and school. To lessen the gap between parent and teacher, strategies to encourage parents to get involved in school education have been devised. However, it was time to think about how to make parents of different social class have equal opportunities to take part in school activities, especially those of the working-class who are, to some extent, neglected and declined to be contacted by school personnel.

As compared with middle-class parents who had comparative advantages in choosing schools for their children, working-class parents were in a worse position in school choice because of their status, their professions and their education background. The power of

direct participation in school was monopolised by middle-class parents. Working-class parents acted as followers whereas middle-class parents were power-initiators. In working-class families, there was a lack of the culture that was compatible with the teachers' culture. Therefore, working-class parents were less likely to comply with teachers' requests than middle-class parents. Besides, social capital emphasizing communication between parents and children, attitude development and values education could be available in both families. It depends mainly on how much effort parents have made in terms of time, attitude and patience. Research findings depict that middle-class parents always talked with their children, consulted them before decision was made and shared the responsibility to supervise their children to do assignments. This could seldom been heard in working-class families, the father of which was too tired to initiate a talk with his children. The mother had to take care of her children. Usually, they had more than three children.

Both parents were eager to be involved. Working-class parents participated in school activities with an attitude of benefit-oriented whereas the attitude of middle-class parents was support-oriented. Working-class parents liked to participate in school programme. However, they would consider what type of benefit they could obtain before determining to participate. They would ask whether it would be helpful to the academic performance of their children. The purpose of participation of middle-class parents was to show support to their children and the school. This is a kind of social education demonstrating mutual respect and understanding between parents and children, and between parents and teachers.

Working-class parents did want to make complaints but they seldom dared to make face-to-face complaints for fear that the teacher would be unfriendly towards their children. They liked to write anonymous letter to school or attached a memo to the student handbook. They sometimes withdrew complaints with a thought that it was destiny that made them in such situation. For the middle-class parents, they would go straight to the principal to complain or would act as parent representatives to speak with the school personnel if they found it necessary. However, they would consider thoroughly before making complaints because they understood how hard school teachers worked. They did not want to make a sample to their children to challenge the teacher. It demonstrates that there is usually mutual respect between school and middle-class families.

In sum, there are different types of attitudes towards involvement in school education among parents of different social class. This will easily cause conflicts among parents, between parents and teachers if parent policies are not promptly adopted in school. Therefore, to ensure better home-school relations to be developed, it is recommended that schools are advised to develop parent polices that will take the needs of parents of working-class parents into consideration. Perhaps parent education to emphasise parents' rights and responsibilities should be conducted by each school with financial support from Education Department. If we emphasise equal opportunities in education, then it is necessary to let parents of different social class to have equal opportunities to be involved in the schooling process of the children and to work as partners with school.

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